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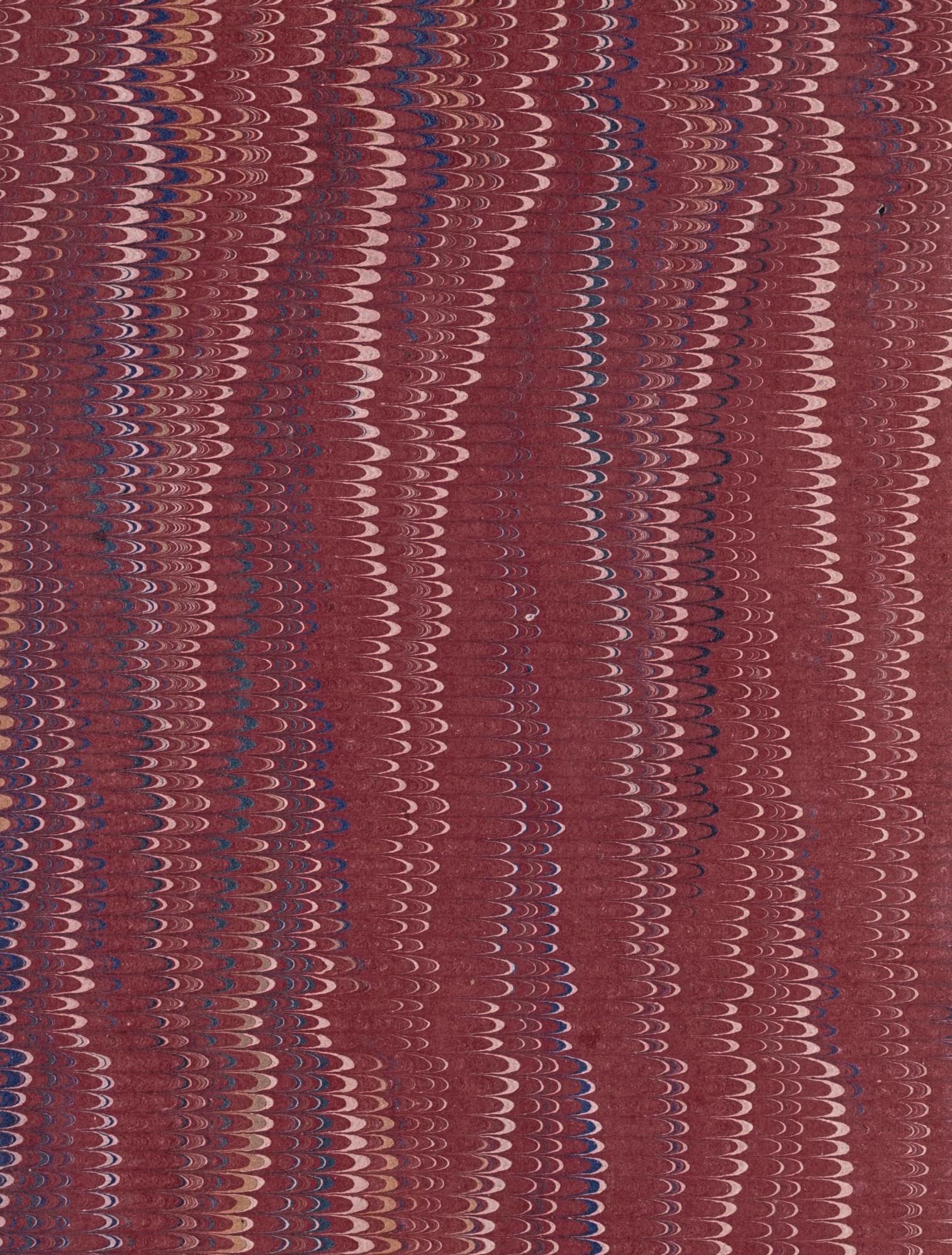
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Anson D. F. Randolph & Co. 900 Broadway New York.

E. S. Doolittle Del.

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

BY

ROSE PORTER.

AUTHOR OF "SUMMER DRIFTWOOD;" "THE YEARS THAT ARE TOLD,"
ETC., ETC.

"The happy Christmas comes once more,
The heavenly guest is at the door;
The blessed words the shepherds thrill,
The joyous tidings—Peace, good-will!

35
"O wake our hearts, in gladness sing!
And keep our Christmas with our King,
Till living song, from loving souls,
Like sound of mighty waters rolls."



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YORK OBSERVER, two from the ILLUSTRATED CHRIS-
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“ CHRISTIAN RELIGION BEGINNETH NOT AT THE HIGHEST,
AS OTHER RELIGIONS DO, BUT AT THE LOWEST. . . . RUN
STRAIGHT TO THE MANGER, AND EMBRACE THIS INFANT, THE
VIRGIN’S LITTLE BABE, IN THINE ARMS ; AND BEHOLD HIM AS
HE WAS BORN, NURSED, GREW UP, WAS CONVERSANT AMONGST
MEN ; TEACHING, DYING, RISING AGAIN, ASCENDING UP ABOVE
ALL THE HEAVENS, AND HAVING POWER OVER ALL THINGS.

“ THIS SIGHT AND CONTEMPLATION WILL KEEP THEE IN THE
RIGHT WAY, THAT THOU MAYEST FOLLOW WHITHER CHRIST
HATH GONE.”—*Luther.*

“Again at Christmas did we weave
The holly round the Christmas hearth,
The silent snow possessed the earth,
And calmly fell our Christmas-eve.”

DO you ever think, as you hold in your hand the Cedar-wound emblems with which we adorn our homes at this festive season, of the deep significance hidden in the choice of the “cedar-green” for our Christmas-tide decorations?

Think of it, green is the color which symbolizes hope.—“And Noah sent forth a dove to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground, and the dove came in to him in the evening, and in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off.”—The color of the spring which typifies new birth, the color that in Christian art is oftentimes used to represent regeneration.

It was green, too, the ancients chose to signify love and constancy in their selection of the emerald as the “stone of love.” Thus, as green is the beautiful undertone that, like tenderest note of music,

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

thrills in every vibration of nature, so it typifies the love, hope, regeneration which thrills in every heart, that hearkens at this Christmas season to the Christmas song that rings out in glad accord, as men and angels chant—"Glory to God."—Does not that glory hold hope?—"On earth peace"—is not that peace, love?—"Good-will to men"—is not this good-will, the amen to regeneration?

Surely, if all this is signified by the color of the branches kissed by sun and shower, wooed by wind and calm into green of deepest dye, the Cedar of which we twine our emblems, must have for us, too, far-reaching meanings; the Cedar, so fragrant in its spicy odor, so incorruptible in its fibre, so glorious for its height; the precious Cedar, so treasured for its healing virtues in the broad land of the East; the tree so exalted in Scripture narration.

These are but hints we give you of the all that is meant by the choice of the Cedar evergreens for our Christmas festival.

Not thoughtlessly, then, but with sacred awe and tenderness, let us bind the green twigs into emblem forms—remembering the Cross, though it be but a cross of Cedar, typifies the grand central Light of

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

our Christian trust; remembering, as we twine the wreath, the circle is the type of eternity; as we form the triangle, that it symbolizes the Holy Three in One; remembering, too, as we bind the anchor, that it whispers of Hope, that hope of the soul, that never with so much of realness as on Christmas day “enters within the veil.”

And, thinking thus, let us forget the beauty of design in the deeper beauty of the symbol, till our heart-thoughts are uplifted from earth’s Christmas evergreens, to that unfading “rainbow round about the throne,” where reigns Bethlehem’s babe—the bow of hope, “in sight like unto an emerald.”

I.

A GROSCHEN SPRIG.

II

I.

“EVERY child under the May-tree of winter
may celebrate his tabernacle feast of hope.”

It was a dreary December day when Mary Deane first read these words of the poet Richter—a day when a “May-tree,” a “tabernacle feast of hope,” seemed all out of place, for at early morning the sleet had begun to patter against the window-panes, the wind to moan through the trees—and the storm was not over when the hands of the little clock on the mantel pointed to four.

There were other reasons, too, why the words seemed not for Mary Deane. Since the last December, the dear Heavenly Father had sent into her life a great sorrow, and the once flowery meadows of hope were shrouded for her, in a mantle of snow—cold, white snow.

Sadly she laid the book down, sighing wearily, for something in the poet’s words wakened in her heart the mystical bells of memory, till they rang out strange, tender notes, bringing back in their sweet-

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

ness, “most musical, most solemn,” thoughts that had long been silent,—thoughts that wooed for the dry, leafless branch Mary called her “Christmas bough,” a tiny sprig of *true Christmas evergreen*; so tiny, at first, it seemed forsooth, like those little scraggy “one-groschen sprigs,” that nestle in and are almost hidden amid the forest firs, piled in such profusion in the squares of Germany’s cities, as “the time draws near the birth of Christ.” The little “one-groschen trees,” ah! if we could follow them, think you not their story would be as sweet, as tender a story, as any their stately companions could tell?—just as the comforts that come to us through little things oftentimes are the richest, and fullest of heart blossoms. The one-groschen trees!—the little sprigs that are fragrant with self-sacrifice—with father and mother love, that lead to homes,—such homes, some of poverty, some— Would you change them for the great firs, that are to shimmer and rustle with shivering gold-leaf, and flashing light, in the homes of the wealthy?

But we must not linger.

Mary Deane never guessed her Christmas evergreen had commenced to bud, while she sat there

A GROSCHEN SPRIG.

feeling so lonely, while in a voice pleading as a cry, she called :

"Let only one flower bloom again, dear Lord, one flower," and once more she repeated the words, "Every child under the May-tree of winter may celebrate his tabernacle feast of hope."

"They are not for me," she murmured. "'Child;' —No! I am not a child. 'May-tree;' No May-tree will bud for me. 'Winter;' that word alone is mine, dreary winter, heart winter.—The 'tabernacle feast;' perhaps in the other land; I may know it again, but not here. Hope, the azure-winged angel, it flew away one summer day, and in its stead came the violet-robed one, whom men call the angel of 'patient waiting'—waiting—what for?"

And then, with one of those sudden impulses that afterwards we recognize as the prompting of the unseen, but ever near Friend, again she repeated the words, "Every child." That child-word; it fell on her ear like balm of tender healing, and softly she whispered, "He called a little child unto Him, and said, Except ye become as little children, ye can not enter the kingdom of heaven"—can not know on earth the tabernacle feast of hope!

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

Reaching across the table, she took up her Bible and read the verses over and over. No hint they gave as to what kind of a child it was Jesus called; just the simple lesson they taught of *child-likeness*, the lesson of a heart full of humility, obedience, love, and truth, as the *true* child-heart is.

“Become as little children”—Mary lingered long over the comfort-word, “*become*, which leaves much time for patience,” much time for learning “that our Heavenly Father trains His children to be small, as we do ours to be great, for the growth of the internal man is a continual growing downward, to humility and simplicity.”

Thinking thus, she was silent for many minutes. When again she spoke, the sigh in her voice had given place to a smile. “‘Every child’—the words, they *do* belong to me, for however weary I am from sorrow and from sin, however sadly I may listen on this Christmas eve to memory’s bells, still I may call, and never too softly can I call for Him to hear.

“‘My refuge and my rest,
As child on mother’s breast,
I lean on Thee.’”

A GROSCHEN SPRIG.

Meanwhile the little green bud in the Christmas bough had unfolded into a leaf.

“May-tree of winter,” next she said, but with the words came the recollection of a visit she had promised to pay; to one “*who needs me*,” she told the faithful servant, who remonstrated, when, half an hour later, she came down-stairs equipped for a walk, despite the storm.

“*Needs me*.” Just while saying those two brief words, Mary found a “May-tree of winter,” for, to the heart, what so like a May-tree of sweet blossoms as the knowledge, “There is some one who needs me!”

The broad avenue was crowded; driving sleet and blowing wind could not keep house-bound the Christmas-gift buyers who were hurrying to and fro. But Mary soon turned off from the busy thoroughfare into a long, narrow street—one of those streets where one sees so mournfully much of poverty, sin, and suffering.

In this miserable place a mission chapel had been erected, and for years, Sabbath after Sabbath, she had been wont to meet with the class of ragged boys who called her “our teacher.”

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

Such a humble, unpretending building was the chapel; had it by some magical touch been lifted from its present surroundings, and placed in the other part of the town, scarce one of the many passers would have noticed it; but down there, they called it "The light of the neighborhood," and children pointed toward it, rubbing their little hands, blue and cold with the biting frost, while they said, "It's allers hot in there."

There were sad-faced, tired women, too, who as they passed the chapel, drew their thin shawls closer about them as they whispered, "When work is over we will go there again, and get some more comfort," —and the comfort was hearing of Jesus.

There were men, also, strong, hard-working men, who spoke of the chapel with softened voices and tear-dimmed eyes, saying, "It was there we first heard of Him, Christ who loves us, and bids us come to Him." Come to Him—such a wonderful invitation that, to poor, outcast, tired men and women !

Mary had visited much in the vicinity, and she felt no fear, though her errand led to an upper room in a rambling tenement-house.

Twice she knocked before the door opened, for

A GROSCHEN SPRIG.

that day, in that dreary place, there had been one before her. One who knocked so loudly, the weeping woman, the rough man crouching over the dying embers of the smoldering fire, had forgotten to listen for the coming of earthly visitors.

It was not a long story they had to tell. Mary knew it all in a glance—knew it even before the woman had taken the hand she outstretched in sympathy, and led her to the quiet corner where the baby lay, sleeping—that quiet sleep—only a three-year-old baby, a golden-haired, a blue-eyed baby. “But, we know who’s took her, Mrs. Deane,” said the weeping mother—and then the room was still.

The streets were dark when Mary turned homeward, yet it did not seem dark to her. She tarried for a moment as she passed the chapel to look in through the open door at the busy group, twining “Christmas greens.” She longed to go in and tell them how one evergreen had been garnered that day in a home only a stone’s throw off; how a flower of faith had bloomed in an humble woman’s heart, because of truths she had learned at the chapel.

But the city car would not wait, and it was late,

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

so she hastened to find a seat in the already crowded conveyance. Every passenger was laden with Christmas packages; one little girl, excited with expectancy for the morrow, looked wonderingly at Mary's empty hands, asking with a child's fearlessness:

"Ain't you got no Christmas presents to carry home?"

And the child laughed so gleefully as she looked down at her own and her father's parcels, she hardly heeded the low-toned reply.

"Yes, I have a gift!"

"We know who's took her, Mrs. Deane"—were these simple words of that poor woman—these child-like words of trust, Mary Deane's Christmas gift? Certain it is, as she repeated them and laid them close beside the sorrow God had sent to her, the "tabernacle feast of hope" entered with them into her heart.

That night the buds and blossoms on Mary's Christmas sprig were full and open; she wondered why ever she had called it dry and leafless!

When the morning came the cold wind had ceased to blow, the chilling sleet to fall. Into Mary's room broad bands of sunlight shone. It seemed to her as

A GROSCHEN SPRIG.

though she had been listening to strains of sweet music—music murmuring of hope—perhaps she had.

“ Some say that ever against the season comes,
Wherein our Saviour’s birth is celebrate,
The bird of dawning, singeth all night long.”

“ Why not rise and go,” she said, “ and keep the tabernacle feast of hope this Christmas day? Why not go and learn of Him who will lift me out of self, and the selfish longing for the something He has taken; the something which I had, but which is gone, and I must do without.” And she went. There were gifts for Mary Deane that Christmas; gifts beautiful and costly, but none so dear as the heart blossoms of peace; the blossom of submission, where had been rebellion; of trust, where had been doubt. “ My groschen sprig,” she called it; “ My evergreen sprig, so small no eye but mine can see it, no heart but mine will know how it buds and blossoms, while I keep it in the sunlight of His presence;” and *that* light it fell so warmly, so tenderly on Mary, that when the New Year eve came, though she sat alone in her desolated home, she yet could sing, with a smile on her face :

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

“Lord Jesus, let me learn of Thee
My lesson this New Year,
Teach me each word, though some may be
Spelt through with many a tear.

“So shall my song of Thee be sweet,
Telling of victory won,
That I have learned at Jesus’ feet,
God’s will, not mine, be done.”

II.

“NO ROOM IN THE INN.”

III.

“So, to grant a pardon free,
Comes a willing Lamb from heaven ;
Hasten we,
One and all, to be forgiven.”

ON a Christmas eve, long ago, there were sounds of joy and music in the city. At midnight they rang the Christmas bells, and at sunrise the notes of the children’s glad Christmas carol floated on the still air, like the song of spring-time birds, so soft and sweet were their tones, as they sung :

“Once o’er the fields of Bethlehem,
Rang out a glory song ;
The hills that heard it sung to them,
Re-echo it along ;
That wondrous sound, that psalm of praise,
Good tidings ever blest,
Forevermore the echoes raise,
O Christus natus est !”

Thus it dawned, the glad Christmas, and wonderful gifts it brought to thousands of dwellers in the

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

great city, but the most wonderful of all was to Hiram Venn !

Hiram Venn, whose lot in life was hard, not from the pressure of poverty—for wealth had surrounded him from infancy—but because, with scarce an effort to stay their inward march, he had admitted into his heart evil thoughts, and they had sown broadcast there their seeds of distrust, envy, and malice; and surely such seed-sowing must make any man's lot hard.

But, as never yet was there a winter without days of sunshine and cheer, so there never yet was a life that did not know some hours lit up by the glimmering of better things; and these glints of light, they had fallen across Hiram's pathway more than once. Even when a child, he had hearkened to the beautiful story, of that long-ago night, when first in the Eastern horizon had shone the star of the Christ-child. And again, in his youth, Hiram had listened to the story of that love without compare, and as he had listened then, almost he had resolved to walk in the pathway guarded by that heaven-born Star, which ever to the eye of faith, goes before the trusting soul “a cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night.” But

“NO ROOM IN THE INN.”

Hiram's youth-time resolve had been only an “almost thou persuadest me,” and like as an uncertain oarsman, glides out and beyond the pathway of light that bridges a broad expanse of water, so Hiram had glided out from the star-lit way ; for, like the moonbeam's path on the rippling water, it is a narrow, narrow way.

Hiram tarried out late on the Christmas eve night. He was a lonely old man, for though ready to do his slightest bidding, servants moved to and fro in his stately residence (it was not a *home* that great house where Hiram Venn lived), there was no smile of love, no word of welcome to greet his return. As he passed up and down the crowded thoroughfares, now and then he paused to look in the gaily-lighted shop-windows, to watch the happy gift-seekers, and the eager salesmen. He lingered, too, at the street corners, to gaze on the great piles of Christmas trees and evergreens that grew less and less as one purchaser after another turned homeward ; some carrying no more than a sprig of the dear green, others bending beneath their load of fragrant cedar and hemlock boughs. And walking as he did, amid the happy scene, and yet not mingling in it, Hiram asked himself :

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

“ Why all this gift exchanging; all this good-cheer-keeping, at the Christmas time ? ” And so overgrown was the old man’s heart with weeds, no space was there for a Christmas blossom to upspring, and whisper the answer, “ They give, because on Christmas day they celebrate God’s unspeakable gift to man, the coming of the Light, and as the broken words, the disjointed sentences of little children are full of meaning to parents’ ears, so these interchanges of tokens of kindness are full of meaning to the Father, who recognizes that by them His children are saying, though it be imperfectly, that they are trying to live out the angel’s song, “ Good-will to men, kindness to all ! ”

When Hiram wearied of the crowded streets, he had turned into a broad avenue, and there he found something to linger for, too, for sounds of gladness rang out from many a brilliantly-lighted home, through the half-drawn curtains of which he caught glimpses of the happy Christmas-keepers ; and again, with the dull sense of being outside of it all, he asked himself :

“ Why these family greetings; why the reunion of friends; why the embracing, too, in the Christmas

“NO ROOM IN THE INN.”

joy, those who have no claim of kindred or friendship ? ”

And no answer his heart gave, for old Hiram Venn had long ago silenced the voice that whispers, “Out of love to Christ, love to man is born, and love, that is freely received, yearns to freely give ;” hence, this reaching out to embrace in the Christmas joy, not only known, but unknown people ; hence this universal “ peace on earth.”

From the avenue, Hiram passed into a narrow street, and so busy was he with his own thoughts he hardly observed where he was going, until suddenly his steps were arrested by the falling of a broad beam of light across his path, and he stood before an open door, through which men and women were passing — plainly-dressed men and women. Some with weary steps, some with pale, poverty-pinched faces. It was not such a company as Hiram was wont to join, and yet he passed in and made one of them. And the very first words he heard on entering that mission chapel, contained, as the bud contains the flower, the setting of Hiram’s Christmas gift : “ There was no room in the Inn.” These were the words—words so few they filled but half a verse in Luke’s narra-

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

tive; and yet to Hiram Venn they were life-laden. All in a minute, memory is so swift of wing, they wafted him back to the days of his childhood, and he seemed to hear his mother's voice telling of the night when Christ was born,—Christ who loves little children; and then, quickly as passing scene of panoramic view, he was a youth, listening to the same story: the story of the Christ who came to earth, bringing pardon for sin, strength for weakness, help for trial, love for sinners; and Hiram remembered—though he was an old man, with hair white as the snow, with form bowed with his many years as the vine is bent beneath the autumn fruit—how his heart had glowed in his youth, with a half resolve to follow the guidance of that Saviour; but, breaking in on these wakened memories like the note of an alarm bell, loud and clear, rang out in Hiram's heart, the words the preacher uttered: “No room in the Inn; no room in the Inn.”

Were they just addressed to him—those words? Did they mean, as entrance had been denied at Bethlehem's Inn, so he, Hiram Venn, had shut the Lord of life out from his heart; shut Him out, and barred it, that heart-door, with the words, “No room

"NO ROOM IN THE INN."

in the Inn?" and—for questions would not be silent in Hiram's heart that Christmas eve night,—What had crowded the Christ out? With what had he filled his heart, that over its portal was written, "No room in the Inn?"

Ah! bitterly groaned the old man, as before him, in swift array, passed the emptiness of the treasures he had garnered, and almost aloud he murmured—

"No room in the Inn, no room; and it is late, too late, to open the door now—too late!" Thus Hiram's soul was revealed to himself that night; thus he saw that threshold and door were barred by sin, heaped upon sin.

But only men say, "Too late;" and, even as Hiram sighed, like the note of far-off music, he heard the Voice calling, "Come to me;" "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

And old Hiram—Hiram Venn—the man who all his life long had shut his heart's door against the heavenly love, softly as a little child whispers, "I am sorry," to a tender mother, murmured, "Lord, pardon me, for Christ's sake; I believe, help Thou

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

my unbelief." And as he thus murmured, the closed door of his heart opened wide, and Christ came in—in—there to abide. Came, only for the asking.

Think you not Hiram Venn's was a blessed Christmas day? Think you not his gift—the gift of pardon for sin—the most wondrous of all the gifts that made glad hearts in the great city on the Christmas morning, the morning heralded with ringing bells and the singing children?

It was long ago all this happened. Many and many a Christmas has come since, and now we stand close to another; our gifts of love and kindness are well-nigh prepared; our homes are already hung with the Christmas evergreens; we have made ready to celebrate the birthday of our Christ.

But have we, one and all, as we have thus made ready the outward signs of our gladness, made ready our hearts too?

In Herod's palace, on the night when Christ was born, there were sounds of revelry and mirth; and only a furlong or two off from that palace was Bethlehem's manger; and yet among the merry throng that crowded Herod's hall, there was not one who

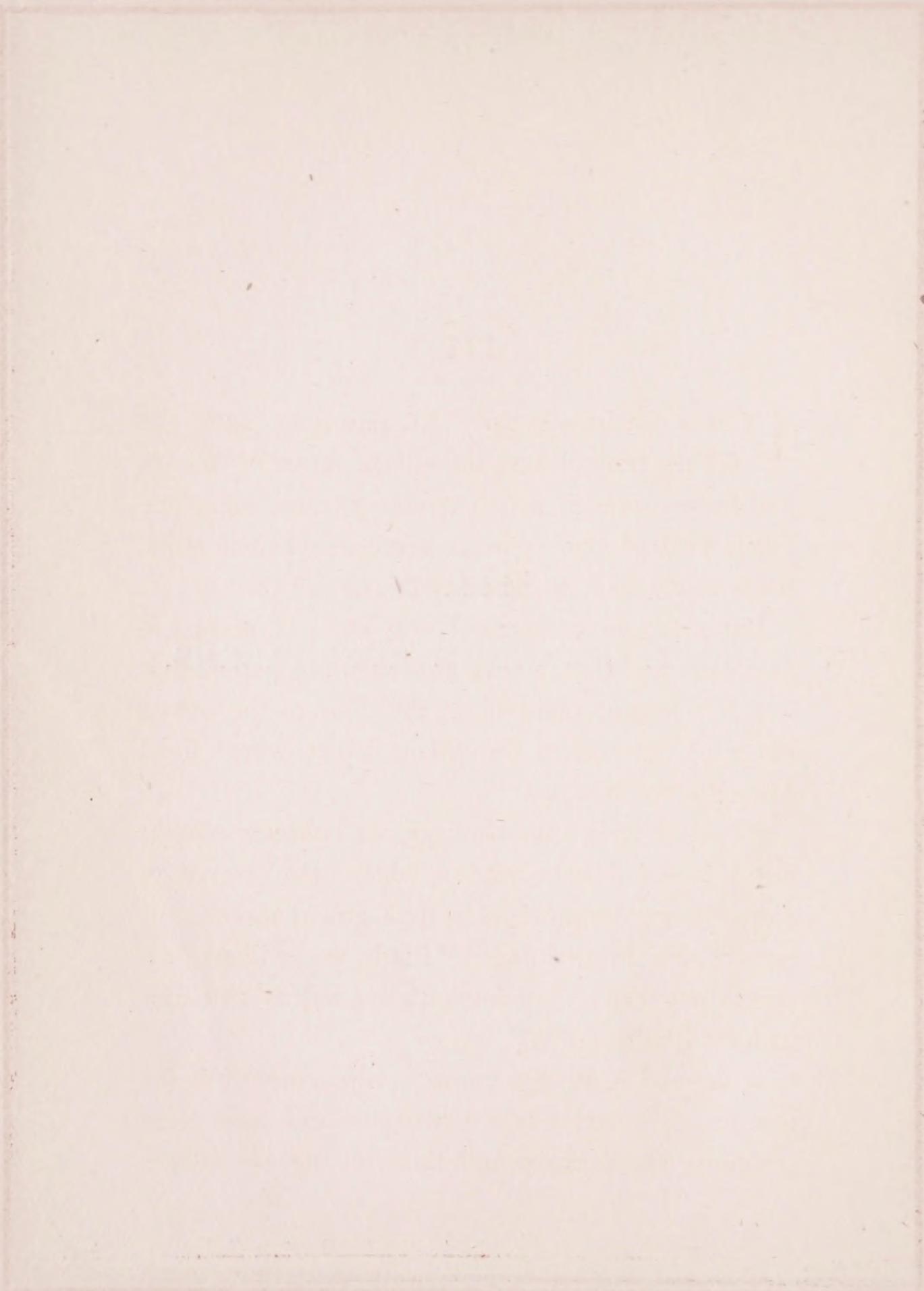
"NO ROOM IN THE INN."

saw the Eastern Star arise. Will it be thus with any of us? Will we enter into the joy and mirth of keeping high holiday, and yet stay outside of the sight of the Christmas Star? As we look into our own hearts, do we find traced there the words Hiram Venn found in his, "No room in the Inn,"—no room for Christ?

Thank God, if we do thus find; yet, though the hour be the twelfth, there is still time to open the door—time to make ready a welcome for the Lord; for only a moment it takes to ask, "Christ, forgive," only a moment to hear the answer, "He that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

III.

RACHEL SPRAGUE'S EVERGREENS.



III.

IT was Christmas eve. All day long, spite the falling snow-flakes, the village street of W— had been thronged with passers—passers, every one laden with parcels—parcels, some small, some large, some dainty in form, some awkward and clumsy.

But about the contents of only one our interest is to centre, and that, a very unpretending parcel, that was left just at nightfall at the door of the brown house at the end of the village street, where lived Miss Rachel Sprague.

It was a long, thin package, its contents naught but a bit of pasteboard, on which was printed in plain letters of sombre hues, dark-greens and shaded browns, the Bible words: “Faith, the evidence of things not seen;”—underneath was written in a firm hand, “I believe this.”

It seemed a strange motto, a very simple gift for the double purpose of a Christmas and New Year greeting, which the pencil lines on the wrapper—

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

"With a happy Christmas and glad New Year to dear Miss Rachel, and I know it will be,"—indicated it was to serve.

Who was Miss Rachel? It is a difficult question to answer; for the pale, thin little woman, whose brow was banded by hair thickly threaded with gray; whose face was marked by lines of pain—the little woman whose step was slow, whose sentences were broken by a cough—this was not Miss Rachel, though thus she was called. No! Miss Rachel Sprague was the little woman whose countenance always wore a smile of such peace, one forgot the pain lines there; whose footfall was so low, one forgot its slowness; whose voice was so gentle, one forgot the cough that broke in between the words, as one is wont to forget, when a wounded bird sings, the bird's pain, because of the sweetness of the song.

Miss Rachel opened the door herself; indeed, with the exception of her one faithful domestic, she was the only occupant of the brown house. Years ago it had been different; then many a light step had crossed its threshold at morning, noon, and night; then gay laughter had echoed through the old rooms; then, on a Christmas eve night, Christmas evergreens

RACHEL SPRAGUE'S EVERGREENS.

had nodded in the flickering fire-light, from chimney-pot and window-hanging; but that *then*—it was long ago—so long ago, remembering it—it seemed as though Miss Rachel's days for Christmas evergreens must be all bygone. Were they?

Miss Rachel thought not; she thought none could ever live to be so old, live to learn so much of sorrow, to feel so much pain, that out of the year ending when Christmas comes, they might not gather a sprig, if it be but one, of Christmas evergreens.

Was she right, think you?

But beside the typical evergreen of a heart attuned to the Christmas song, “Glory to God, peace, goodwill to man,” Miss Rachel had a veritable sprig of green, though it was but a tiny branch of cedar that had been trampled on and half crushed. Jim, the baker’s boy, had brought it, with a smile so bright, Miss Rachel had smiled in reply to his words :

“It ain’t worth much, ma’am, for ye see I picked it up alongside of the church, from a heap of rubbish they brushed out arter the trimming was done.”

Nevertheless, Miss Rachel found a place in her very best china vase for the green branch, spite its coming from a rubbish heap. She cared for it, too,

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

just as much, perchance more, as she could have done, had Jim brought it fresh from its forest home. Why was this? Was there a life-story hidden in that bit of crushed cedar that made it dear to the old woman? For Miss Rachel was old; her years numbered sixty and more.

For full five minutes after the coming of the parcel Miss Rachel did not remove its wrapper; she just stood in the cheery glow of the blazing wood fire, while she read over and over the lines, "With a glad Christmas, and happy New Year, to dear Miss Rachel, and I know it will be."

"How does the lad know that?" she presently said, and the smile on her face broadened, though tears filled her eyes; tears which fell like rain-drops, as laying aside the wrapper she read the motto, and the penciled words beneath.

For the answer to Miss Rachel's question we must turn backward to a dreary November day, a day when Miss Rachel had forgotten all about the moaning wind, the falling leaves, so absorbed was she in conversation with her young visitor, Philip Flint, who, half impatiently, had asked:

"What do you mean, Miss Rachel, by saying obey

RACHEL SPRAGUE'S EVERGREENS.

Christ's command, trust Him, and you will know what faith is, for you will have it; you will know how to choose between right and wrong?"

Miss Rachel had hesitated before replying, for how could she, an old woman, answer that eager questioning youth?—she, whose life was so secluded from the busy world, that almost it seemed sheltered from temptation; only *seemed*, for temptation, that subtle thing, full well Miss Rachel knew, could steal its way into the very quietest, most hidden life.

While she pondered, the verse, "Whosoever He saith unto thee, do it," came to her, and softly she repeated the words to the young man, and then she told him the thoughts that followed close upon them in her mind. And though Miss Rachel was all unlearned in what we call theology, though her religious reading was bounded by the Bible, and an old, much-worn hymn-book, yet her words touched Philip Flint, though he was a scholarly young man, as never voice of preacher, or page of eloquent writer, had done; and, hearkening to them, he caught, as never he had done before, the meaning of that first miracle which Jesus did at Cana of Galilee, when the command was not the doing of some difficult

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

thing, but simply, “fill the water-pots with water.”

Yes, Philip saw, as he never had done before, how obeying Christ’s command, only to become as a little child in trust, was all that was needed to lead Him, the Lord, to perform the miracle of changing the heart of doubt into a heart of faith.

Yet all Miss Rachel said was :

“ You ask me, Philip, how ‘ faith is the evidence of things not seen.’ Ah, my lad, how can I tell this by *words*—how explain when temptations come, and for a moment make wrong things look like right, what it is to hear a voice whispering in the heart, ‘ right is stronger than wrong, truth than falsehood ;’ for, Philip,” and Miss Rachel’s voice trembled, “ this heart-whisper, it does not argue ; it just says, obey the right, for you know it, though the way of wrong may look right. And when you obey that whisper, you will know how ‘ faith *is* the evidence of things not seen.’ ”

This was all in substance that Miss Rachel said to Philip Flint, but it was enough ; and it tells you why he chose as his Christmas gift for her the words that were the index of a new life to him.

RACHEL SPRAGUE'S EVERGREENS.

And you know, too, why, as Miss Rachel read the penciled words, "I believe this," tears filled her eyes, while gladness thrilled her heart; and do you think it strange,—that she recognized this acknowledgment of Philip's, that he had been led by her influence to trust in Christ, as a Christmas evergreen given by her heavenly Father? Do you think it strange that she softly said to herself:

"Surely just these precious gladnesses, that Christ sends, to let us know that He has blessed some feeble word of ours, spoken from love to Him, are the *true* Christmas evergreens."

Are they? and if they are, how many of us can hang the secret home-place—our hearts—with anchors, stars, and crowns woven of such greens, at this Christmas time?

I V.

“SOMETHING MAY COME.”

IV.

NO one ever pulls our door-bell with such a sharp jerk as the postman. When he came yesterday, just after tea, only one quick motion of his hand started the bell at the end of the hall, into so rapid a swing, that it sounded ever so long after he had gone.

What did he bring?—Well, there were three letters and a paper. One letter was for father, the other two for Mary and me. We girls were watching for the postman. You see, at this holiday time, one can not help watching, for who knows what may come!

I wonder whether old and common-sense people ever get beyond whispering to themselves at Christmas, “Perhaps something may come.” I wonder why they always say with their voice, “No, it is impossible,” and yet look with their eyes, every time the bell rings, as though their heart had forgotten all about the “*im*,” and were thinking, “it is possible.”

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

It seems almost like a falsehood, this contrast between saying and looking.

One of the letters was in a huge yellow envelope, and the queerest-looking thing, all covered with foreign stamps and strange postmarks. At first we could not think who had sent it, and just as people always do when they can't think, kept looking at it and wondering, instead of opening and finding out, till suddenly it flashed over Mary that it must have come from cousin Frank, who is studying abroad. Sure enough it was, and he wrote us of how Christmas was kept in Germany, how even the very poorest have a sprig of green on their tables on that day. How every child has a gift, the largest cities being divided into districts, so that not even the least little child is overlooked.

I like it so much, this making Christmas a glad season to all. It is beautiful to know every child is joying, because the "Christ-child has come and brought him a gift."

After we had finished reading his letter, we had a long talk about the old customs and associations of Christmas, with the "Christ-child," "Saint Nicholas," and "Santa Claus."—Mary always wants to

"SOMETHING MAY COME."

trace everything back to its beginning, so she brought out from father's study an old book, in which we found much about Santa Claus.

It said—"The superstition originated in the history of an ancient German baker, whose heart was so large, and warm, that like Plato's it contained a blessing for every little child, and whose oven was so large that it contained once every year, when Christmas with snowy feet came singing down to earth, sweet, delicious cakes for every child who came with smiles and kind wishes to his door. This good baker, whose name was Nicholas, was so beloved by all the children far and near, that when he died they mourned for him with sore lamentation, and the church, hearing the wailing of their voices, straightway canonized the good baker, and so he became the patron saint of little children."

Lucy thinks, even to this day, that Santa Claus is hid away in the drawer, where mother keeps her presents. I wish she would believe as I do, that it is the "Christ-child" from whom they come, but I can not make her understand.

Just after we found that extract, father and mother came home. They had been down Broadway to-

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

gether. Mother's bag was full, bulging out in queer little knotty places, and father carried a great package.

"Books, I know they are books," Mary whispered; she loves books so, but as for me—!

Mother said it was late for us to be up, and after good-night kisses, hurried us off to bed.

It was not long before the house was still; I suppose they had all gone to sleep, but I could not, for I kept thinking over what we had been talking about.

It was all so confused in my mind. The beautiful thought of the Christ-child bringing us everything that makes us happy, and those other strange thoughts of Santa Claus seemed all mixed with visions of mother's full bag and father's package.

By and by I opened my eyes wide and looked toward the window, through which I could see the sky and stars. One little star sent twinkling beams right down, as though it were smiling at me; and then it seemed to me as though the star began to sing the very sweetest song, ending every verse with the question:

"What gift hast thou to give the Christ?"

"SOMETHING MAY COME."

Listening to the words repeated over and over, made me ask myself, "What offering have I to bring Him on His birthday?"—And, I could not help it, I just hid my face under the bed-clothes and cried, because I had nothing to give. I never had let a birthday of father's, mother's, or the girls' go by, without giving them a gift, and yet I had nothing for Him, whom ever since the summer, my heart has loved better than father, mother, or Mary, though I can only confess it tremblingly yet, because—why—because I do so many things to grieve Him.

When I looked up at the star again, my eyes were blinded with tears, but it was twinkling just the same, and one little ray of golden light flashed from it right into my heart, filling it with a joyous trembling, for surely I thought it must be my Christmas gift "coming down;" and then I seemed to hear distinctly a voice saying :

"Whatsoever thing thou doest to the least of Mine and lowest, that thou doest unto Me."

Just then Lucy began to cough, and called me to bring her a glass of water. It did seem so cold to get out of my warm bed, for a minute I hesitated, when I seemed to hear again the words, uttered not

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

as though they had been spoken long ago, or were written in the Bible, but just as though they were said to me, "Inasmuch as ye do the least deed, the least homely service, from love to Christ, ye do it unto Him."

I have not told mother and Mary about it, but since we were talking the other day of how at this season people always are thinking "something may come," I thought I would tell you how my Christmas gift has come. So you see it is just a secret between you and me. And yet the promise is full enough to supply all who will accept the precious gift of service for His sake, with a Christmas gift from Christ, and a Christmas offering for Christ.

"High above a Star is shining,
And the Wise Men haste from far ;
Come, glad hearts, and spirits pining !
For you all has risen the Star.
Let us bring our poor oblations,
Thanks and love and faith and praise.

"Hark ! the heaven of heavens is ringing :
Christ the Lord to man is born :
Are not all our hearts, too, singing,
Welcome, welcome, Christmas morn ?

"SOMETHING MAY COME."

Still the Child, all power possessing,
Smiles as through the ages past,
And the song of Christmas-blessing
Sweetly sinks to rest at last."

V.

A PEARL FOR THE NEW YEAR.

V.

NOT many days ago, just between the daylight and the dark, I held in my hand a picture—a quaint little picture—made more quaint and mystical because seen in the dim light.

It was of a far-away Eastern shore; gazing at it, into my memory came the words of one who wrote, "Truly, pictures are the books of the unlearned, and the mislearned too." Can it be, I asked myself, a page of thought, perchance of comfort, is waiting to be unfolded from this simple print? And then, (did it ever happen so to you?) while I was looking—while I was thinking, I rested my head on the soft cushion of the lounge, and fell into a quiet sleep, or twilight reverie, whichever you call those times of melody-like dreamings, which come to us oftenest in the gloaming hour, or toward the dawning, when the darkness is fading before the light. Where do they meet and kiss, I wonder—the darkness and the light?

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

It seemed in my dream as though I were traveling through the strange country I had looked upon in the little picture. Weary and foot-sore, I sought repose on the "low-lying shore" of this unknown land. Before me, stretched the broad ocean; the ocean that separated me from home. (Was it seeming? Was it a dream? Are we not all travelers through a strange land, often weary and foot-sore, looking with longing eyes across the dark waters that flow between us and our true *Home*?)

By my side I thought there lay clusters of sea-mosses, rosy mosses, tangled in with faint, shadowy brown and bright green. Shells there were, too, of curious forms and rainbow hues. Could it be the dashing, storm-tossed waves had drifted up these fragile, beautiful things? Why not! Are not the soul's richest, purest flowers, those that have floated up from heart-depths, where rude waves have surged and moaned? Where do they bud oftenest, the pure white blossoms of humility, the blue-eyed flowers of trust, but from hearts through which storms have swept! And then, I thought, far out on the water, I spied a vessel, with wide-spread sails like a white-winged sea-bird, approaching the shore; nearer and

A PEARL FOR THE NEW YEAR.

nearer it came; so near, methought I heard the voices of the mariners. Some wondrous treasure they seemed bringing from their voyaging. Can they be, I wondered, seekers of "the goodly pearls," returning home? Had they found the one precious pearl of great price?

"The pearl of great price." What is it?—Christ said, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, sold all that he had, and bought it." Must we go, then, like the merchantmen voyaging, to find it—the "pearl of great price?"—"Behold the kingdom of God is within you."

Then I seemed to see two, whose authoritative tones marked them rulers of the ship's company, disembark, and with agile motion spring from rock to rock, leaping the deep waterpools that lay between the now anchored vessel and the shore. Close by my side I thought they came, while they waited the approach of one attired as a prince of the land, who, attended by a single slave, came toward us. In his hands the prince brought money and jewels, calling, "See, what a costly price I pay for your pearls."

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

But they shook their heads—the merchantmen—while in low voices they answered :

“ Money, jewels, they can not buy the pearl we have found. ‘Without money,’ and ‘without price ;’ he who would win this pearl must seek.”

(What ! is there a pearl, so precious, that the Lord of Life called it the “pearl of great price ;” and yet the only price we need to bring in return for it, is our poverty, our helplessness, and childlike trust in Him !)

Then, in my dream, they seemed to vanish from my sight—the prince and the merchantmen; and again I was alone on that Eastern shore. The only sound that broke the stillness, was the never-ending music of the ocean waves rippling on the beach; and methought, I rose to go, but first I stooped for a white shell that lay half-hidden in the yellow sand at my feet. I held it to my ear, the pure, white shell, listening, as children listen, to hear the song of the sea, which is ever singing in the ocean shells. “ Seek,” it seemed to sing, “ seek it, the pearl of great price, it is the New Year gift for you.”

Just then my reverie or dream ended. They came into the room, bringing lights—(lights of man’s in-

A PEARL FOR THE NEW YEAR.

vention; they did not know an unseen Light was shining there for me).

“What! sitting in the dark?” they asked.

“Dark! No, I did not think it dark,” I replied.

“You have been asleep,” a child’s voice called.

(Asleep—had I been asleep? Well, if I had—where do we go when asleep, but “into the bosom of the Father who giveth sleep.”)

Waking or sleeping, what better greeting can the New Year bring to any of us than this, “Seek it, the pearl of great price, to be found only by those who come, just feeling their need of Him, the Lord Christ.”

What shall we remember it for, this New Year?—Standing on its threshold, we know not, we only know, through all the coming years of our lives, we must remember it for something (for, never yet did a year pass without leaving some “memory, which is a possession”), perchance, it may be for the dawning of a great joy, or the falling of a shadow, dark from the valley of shadows. We can not lift the veil that hides the coming days, but we can accept the gift offered, which can make all days, whether sorrow-laden or joy-crowned, blessed to us. The gift of

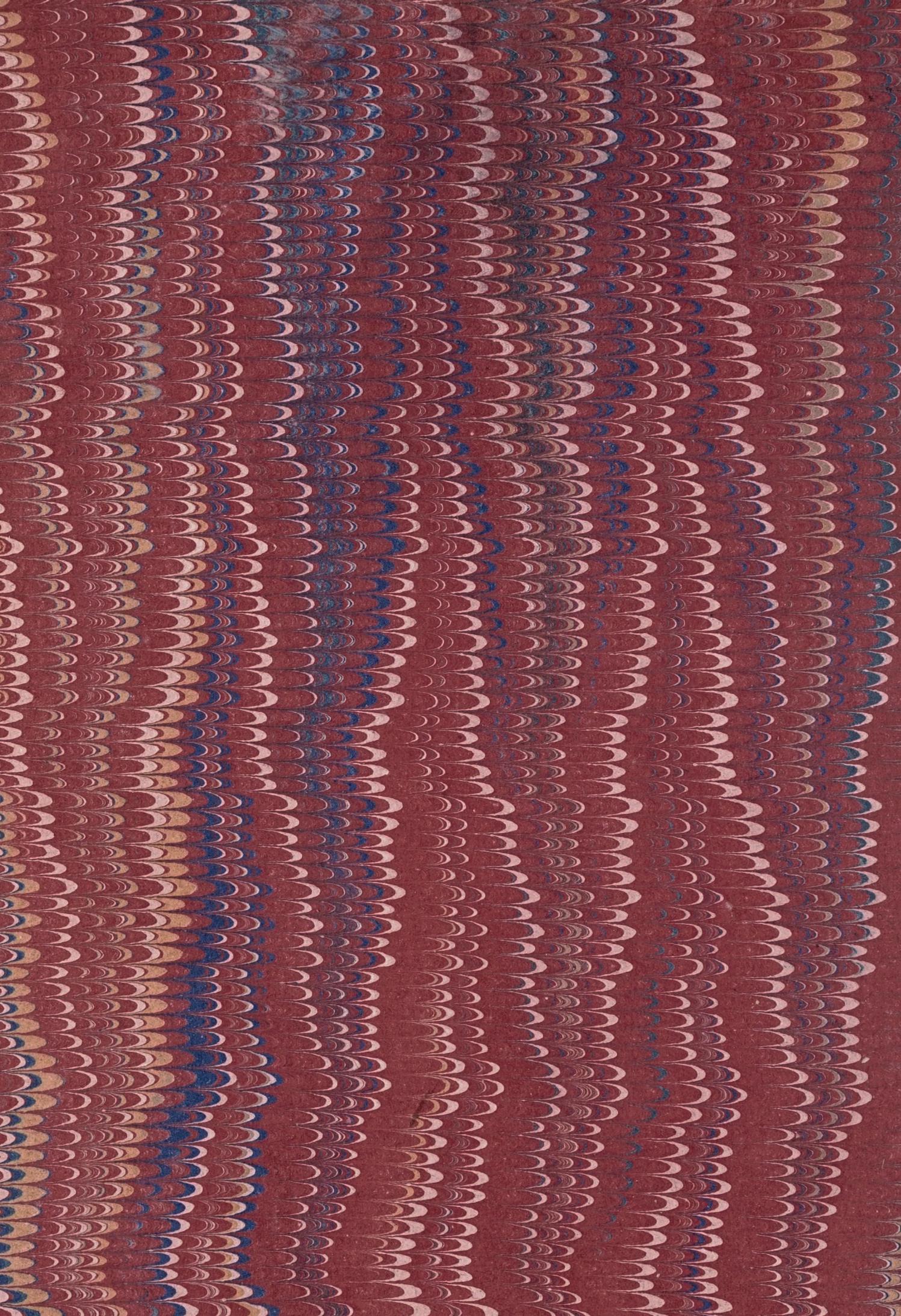
CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS.

the pearl, “ the stone of the wise, whose true name no one knows, but he who has it, and wears it in his heart.”

“ They gave to Thee
Myrrh, frankincense, and gold;
But, Lord, with what shall we
Present ourselves before Thy Majesty,
Whom Thou redeemest when we were sold?
We’ve nothing but ourselves, and scarce that neither;
Vile dirt and clay;
Yet it is soft, and may
Impression take.
Accept it, Lord, and say, this Thou hadst rather;
Stamp it, and on this sordid metal make
Thy holy image, and it shall outshine
The beauty of the golden mine.”

JEREMY TAYLOR, 1650.







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